‘All is well’: The Construction of Martyrdom in the Diary of Emily Hawley Gillespie (1838-1888)

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Résumé

Le journal d'Emily Hawley Gillespie est un document rare qui offre une plongée émouvante dans le quotidien d'une fermière de l'Iowa au XIXe siècle et dévoile la complexité des processus à l'œuvre dans l'écriture d'un journal et la construction de la mémoire. Ses 2500 pages n'étaient pas conçues comme une chronique du quotidien mais comme une œuvre autobiographique destinée à attester les qualités intellectuelles de l'auteure ainsi que le martyre enduré par celle-ci au sein d'un foyer en décomposition. Oscillant entre secret et révélation, le journal cherche à immortaliser Emily Gillespie comme une mère idéale, une épouse patiente et une malade exemplaire. Cet article se centre sur les dernières années de la diariste et montre comment les modes d'écriture de la douleur et de la maladie s'inscrivent dans un désir de sublimer le présent et façonner l'avenir. Cette entreprise fut aussi celle de la fille de Gillespie qui, en révisant, transcrivant et transmettant les journaux de sa mère, contribua à sacraliser le souvenir de celle-ci.

Abstract

Emily Hawley Gillespie's diaries offer a rare insight into the daily life of a farmer's wife in 19th-century Iowa and into the intricate processes of diary writing and memory shaping. This extraordinarily voluminous journal, kept over three decades, was not meant to be a mere record of life and work but an autobiographical legacy destined to testify to Emily Gillespie's intellectual abilities and domestic martyrdom in her slowly disintegrating home. Hovering between revelation and secrecy, the diary seeks to immortalize its author as an ideal mother, patient wife and perfect invalid. This essay, which focuses on the last years of the diarist's life, explores how the writing of pain and suffering seeks to sublimate the present and shape the future. This was done with the collaboration of the author's daughter who revised, transcribed and transmitted Gillespie's notebooks with a view to memorialize her mother.

Mots-clés: journal, autobiographie, femmes, 19ème siècle, corps, souffrance, mémoire

Key words : diary, autobiography, women, 19th century, body, suffering, memory

Outline

Texte intégral

'All is well': The Construction of Martyrdom in the Diary of Emily Hawley Gillespie (1838-1888)

In the landscape of 19th-century Midwestern rural womanhood, the life of Emily Hawley Gillespie stands out as a remarkable blend of typicality and atypicality. Emily Hawley was born in 1838 on a modest farm in Michigan, moved at age 23 to eastern Iowa where she worked as a paid domestic helper for relatives, got married, had children and lived the life of an ordinary farmer's wife until her death at age 49, on March 24, 1888. Yet, Emily Hawley Gillespie had social ambition and a gender consciousness that not all women of her cultural background shared. She dreamed of becoming a published writer, a poet, an artist, and she supported women's rights. Mostly, she kept from the age of 19 until her death, a diary that became the symbol of her bourgeois aspirations as well as the confidant of her increasing frustration. This extraordinarily voluminous diary of 2500 pages was brought to the foreground by Judy Nolte Lensink who edited and published 10% of the manuscript document in 1989. Lensink's significant edition, which contributed to the recovery of women's silent voices launched by women's social historians in the wake of the second feminist wave, sheds light on the complex goals and process of female diary writing.

Emily Hawley Gillespie's journal offers a perfect illustration of three characteristics which, although central to diary writing, and 19th-century diary writing in particular, are not always clear to the modern reader. First, the use of the singular (diary/ journal[1]) is delusive for such documents must often be conceived as a plural, heterogeneous, fragmented body of textual, paratextual and non textual elements. Diarists used several types of medium, ranging from loose sheets to hard bound volumes and they occasionally inserted newspaper articles, poems, photographs, drawings, locks of hair, or dried flowers in their notebooks.

Secondly, diaries in the 19th century were rarely strictly private documents; they were rather semi private texts, often shared with special friends or family members who sometimes wrote in the journal. For instance, Emily's daughter, Sarah, inserted entries in the diary of her mother who did the same with Sarah's journal. Likewise, diaries were not exclusively conceived as a record of the self, but could be used as account books, religious introspection, and/or family chronicles which women often kept. The concept of the diary as a secret (and increasingly feminized) notebook with a lock flaunting the secrecy of the contents it protects, only emerged in the late 19th/early 20th century. (Culley, 4-10, Temple and Bunkers, 204)

Thirdly, although the main function of a diary or journal is, as both terms' etymologies indicate, to keep a record of the passing *days*, the process of diary writing is not so much a linear as a back and forth one; indeed, diarists often read the previous entries before adding a new one, peruse former volumes and revise, annotate, rewrite or destroy them (or parts of them) in the light of their present life, or with the intention of transmitting or publishing their personal records. In the very acts of revision, destruction, or transmission, the diarist becomes author, censor, and editor of her/his own text, which ultimately raises the question of truth in these nonfiction writings.

A number of late 20th-century scholars, especially in the field of gender studies, consider that a journal offers the most authentic form of life-writing. Suzanne Bunkers, who studied Midwestern women's personal writings, notes that she likes to think of the diary as "the most authentic form of autobiography because it reflects life as process rather than product." ("What do Women Really Mean?" 211) Lensink, in the conclusive chapter to her edition of Gillespie's diary, argues that such texts may well constitute a privileged form of female autobiography that challenges "legitimate autobiographical design" and is closer to truth:

> I liken reading a diary to watching a young child at play. If you can catch her in a private moment, you come closer to hearing her real voice; once she knows you are listening, however, that voice becomes adulterated. It becomes even more modified for a larger audience. It still poses as a child but the private voice was much better. Once diaries are considered texts (no longer subtexts), we can use them to read women's culture, no longer seen as a subculture. (384)

In Lensink's and other scholars' essays, the pattern and criteria of classical autobiographies are perceived as male defined while the diary is valued as a genre congenial to women's self expression, adaptation and resistance to gender constraints. Thus, in the last two decades of the 20th century, the diary became the combined object of a literary and feminist debate (Franklin, Gannett, Huff, Hogan, Nussbaum).

Yet, the greater authenticity of diaries becomes problematic when multiple and elusive manuscript versions exist. Lensink herself was confronted with this puzzling issue a few years after the publication of Emily Hawley Gillespie's journal, when she realized that, to some extent, she had worked on what she calls a "faux diary." ("They Shut Me Up" 153)

A detailed description of the material composition of the volumes will shed light on the complex processes of rewriting at stake. In 1952, Emily's daughter, anxious to document pioneer life in Iowa and, above all, memorialize her mother's life, gave her mother's journal to the Iowa State Historical Society of Iowa City. While the volumes for 1874-1888 are in the hand of Emily, the journals covering the years 1858-1874 were a holograph copy written by Sarah who confided the original manuscripts to a nephew. In the 1980s, as Lensink was completing her study of the diary, she unsuccessfully tried to check the original manuscripts and, relying on a number of clues, eventually concluded that the daughter's copy was globally a faithful one. (*A Secret*, xx) Only a decade later did she learn that Sarah had entrusted to the nephew not one but *two* versions of her mother's diaries for this period; indeed, in the 1870s, when Emily was a wife and a mother, she rewrote her young years' record. When Lensink (by then Temple) had access to the two manuscript versions, she was astonished by the subtle yet significant differences between them. By "recopying, reordering, revising, reinventing, and revitalizing the text of her life" ("They Shut Me Up" 160), Temple demonstrates that Emily "memorialized her best youthful self" (157), staging herself as a refined and educated heroine of romance, embellishing her role in her parents' household and enhancing her sexual purity. There are several hints, even in the subsequent journals covering 1874-1885, that Emily was fond of "copying over" her old diaries but the earliest drafts have not been recovered.

Dealing with multilayered texts covering several decades of a lifetime obviously embarks scholars on a frustrating quest for *the* original manuscript. Such quests, aside from often proving impossible, remind us that a diary has a life and a body of its own which, in the end, are often meant to immortalize the author's most positive self. In many ways, Emily wanted to be a model of "true womanhood," a good wife, a perfect mother, a virtuous Christian. Yet, for a number of reasons, her married life on an isolated farm failed to provide the ideal she aspired to; her use and shaping of the diary followed a paradoxical dynamic that consisted in masking and unmasking the growing sense of dissonance that characterized her life. This sense of dissonance reached a climax in the last years of Emily's life, and particularly after 1885, when she was struck by disease.

The purpose of this essay is to explore the complex connections at stake between the diarist's body and the textual body of the diary by focusing on the journal covering the last 14 years of Emily's life (1874-1888), when tensions with her kin and within the household dramatically increased. The manuscripts of these diaries are part of the gift made by Sarah to the Iowa Historical Society of Iowa City, and they are, as said above, written in Emily's handwriting. The manuscripts reveal that the author's mode of inscribing the body reflects the painful duality she suffered from and evolves into a pattern of martyrdom in which the diarist occupies a self-effacing center stage position. In the same way as Emily created an authorized version of her "best youthful self," it seems that she crafted a version of her best aging and dying self through the construction of a martyr figure.[2]

Hiding and recording the slow disintegration of Home

When Emily Hawley married James Gillespie in September 1862, she renounced the ideal type of a genteel, refined and educated partner who could have offered her the middle-class lifestyle she craved for. The pressure of time (24 was then a rather late age for marriage), combined with her attraction to James and her wish to have a home, pushed her to accept the difficult lot of a farmer's wife. There is ample evidence in the writings of Emily that despite her desire for financial independence and initial reluctance to matrimony, she cherished the Home as the sentimental and moral haven extolled by Victorian culture. Before her marriage, she had written two short stories, one a tribute to women's autonomy ("Woman's Rights"), and the other a homage to family life ("Evenings at Home") which, although contradictory at first sight, both pointed to the domestic sphere as the only place compatible with real happiness. (Lensink, *A Secret* 98-99) In the early stage of her marriage, Emily filled the diary with references to their happy home, describing James as her loved companion, fearing for his health, dreading his going to fight in the civil war, and blessing God for the birth of their children.[3] The entry for February 25, 1866 reads:

> We are at home, & may we not safely say all is well? yes (sic), we are a happy family circle; little Henry just learning to talk, & baby just begins to be cunning-James is so kind, O may I thank God for giving me such a kind husband & may I try to return his kindness.

Emily was much aware of the moral virtues of true wifehood and motherhood that an increasing number of advice manuals was spreading.[4] She tried to conform to a wife's obligation to ever be "kind," patient and cheerful, and she was conscious of the awesome responsibilities of a mother. (*A Secret*, 127) Like many other 19th-century diarists, she used her journal to simultaneously confess her shortcomings, find relief in prayer, and testify to her virtuous intentions. But a fairly uncommon aspect of Gillespie's diaries, given the author's social background, lies in the recurring insertion of poems (some copied and many composed) that break with the linearity and monotonous rhythm of the daily entries. Increasingly, Emily used these poems to signal jarring events and emotions:

> Clean up house &c. James help Uncle thresh 'tis the first day of the fair, I would like to go very much indeed.
>
> But when a man <u>wont</u>
> A woman can not—
> We must try to not despair
> Our little children yet need care,
> May God be with us every day,
> To guide us safely through
> And help us to endure
> The trifles which crowd their way—
> Then let us truly, safely live & tell
> That all is well,— all is well (September 24,1872)

The first segment of the first sentence is quite representative of the type of content found in most entries, i.e. a factual description of her own and the family members' activities. The second segment refers to her thwarted wish to go to the fair which, as the introductory lines of the poem indicate, seems related to her husband. Typically, the tone and message of the remaining lines sound like a prayer and the conclusion, "All is well," echoes Emily's favorite motto. The whole extract provides an interesting example of obfuscation, a strategy that many diarists resort to when dealing with delicate subjects.[5] In the poem, Emily stages a selfless

persona, melting the "I" into generic or ill-defined categories ("woman", "we", "us"). At the same time, the whole poem gives shape and strength to the subdued voice which is not only that of a devoted Christian mother but also of a lucid woman aware of the oppressive patriarchal system she lives in. It is worth noting that a few months before this entry, Emily lauded the paper *Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly*, to which she subscribed, and claimed "may right prevail; may women vote & help to make the laws which govern them." (March 22, 1872)[6]

By the 1870s, tensions already existed in the couple but the next decade was marked by a strong deterioration of the family structure. The main reason for this was that James apparently suffered from manic depression, alternating suicidal impulses and violent outbreaks. In the 1880s, the diary recorded the growing frequency of his "bad spells" (308), his "fits of insanity" (335) his cruel treatment of farm animals (270), his bullying his son Henry (304, 335) whom he once tried to strangle, and the scornful, abusive language that he often used when addressing Emily. Gillespie was very critical of his wife's refined tastes, of her wish to send her children to the best schools, and her social aspirations. As Emily developed a very intense relation with her son and daughter, she increasingly depicted her husband as a rough, unpredictable and threatening character who spread terror in the home. In June 1883, she confided that she could not sleep at night (268) and after her decision to no longer share his bed and sleep in the hallway, she noted that she "put a chair at the head of the stairs every night […] so that if anyone should come up they would hit it & wake me up" (October 27, 1885). The couple was also deeply divided over differing perceptions of work and property. While James loudly complained that his wife did not help him enough on the farm, Emily portrayed herself as a prisoner to endless chores and in particular "the monotonous round of kitchen work." Again, she could turn to lyrical forms to sublimate the dullness of her daily life:

> Tis hard to live a hermits life.
> Ah my little ones I live for thee.
> Bright prospects before thee rise
> May I live to help thee gain the prize.
> Tis getting late-just one o'clock
> Have only done-half my days work;
> Children soon come-tired & hungry,
> James doing chores—all in a hurry.
> Wonder if there will all the year through
> Just as much work every day to do?
> Work on and wait ever
> Despair not no never.
> Always look on the side that is brighter (December 26, 1874 and January 3, 1881)

Yet, the strategy of poem writing, which here combines a legacy to her children, an assertion of her literary skills, and an expression of mastered despair, gradually gave way to occasional spontaneous outbursts of frustration or rage; in 1882, Emily bitterly noted: " I have burned 20 years of my life by the heat off (sic) that stove," and a few years later, disgusted with James's decision to use the hard won money she had made with her turkey raising in order to pay the taxes, she wrote in anger: "I shall not raise any next year, I can <u>not</u> be such a slave any more." (December 10, 1885)

Through the 1880s, the diary becomes the tale of the terrible transformation that the home undergoes, as well as the tale of Emily's desperate efforts to "keep our little family together." (August 17, 1885) By 1885, her hopes definitely crumbled when her husband, who had given

her a deed of the farm a few years earlier, forced her to sign it back. After resisting his continuous pressure for two years, Emily had to comply in order to avoid paying her father's debts. This humiliating surrender, which reflected women's inferior legal position, literally and symbolically dispossessed her of the Home she had striven to build: "I gave James a deed of the farm; indeed I felt as though it was signing myself out of a home." (April 2, 1885) And a few months later, revealing James's early suicidal behavior, she made this radical statement which leads to wonder how far she embellished the truth in her earlier diaries: "I have never seen a happy day since less than two weeks after we were married." (August 10, 1885)
The crisis over the deed of the farm occurred in a more global context of kin strife, for Emily had strained relations with her father and her sister who sided with James.[7] In this disintegrating family network, Emily's health significantly declined, as though the collapse of her domestic structure also impacted her most intimate home—her body. Eventually leaving her house—the couple separated and she and her children moved to Manchester in 1887 while James remained on the farm—Emily, who had now become an invalid, could only count on her son, her daughter, and her writing.

Writing beyond the body: the head as metaphor of the self

By the mid 1880s, the diary, both in its form and content, is dominated by several types of interconnected dysfunctionalities. The dysfunctional family[8] it describes is coupled with the increasingly dysfunctional body of the diarist, which ultimately entails gaps in the textual body of the narrative. What is of interest here is to explore how Emily Gillespie inscribes her suffering body in order to shape and transmit an immortal version of herself, and how she ultimately weaves her dying body into her "Diary of Life." This phrase, which is the title of a poem she composed and noted on the title page of a volume of her journal in 1876, not only confirms the autobiographical status of the diary but also its life-giving force. In many ways, diary writing is used by Emily as a powerful healing and regenerating tool which not only provides immediate relief but also long lasting meaning. At the heart of the diary as therapy, memory and memorial stands the figure of the sacrificial mother and martyred wife with which Emily increasingly identified.
By the mid 1880s, and especially after the spring of 1885, shortly after she was forced to "sign [her]self out of a home," Emily started to record a "dizzy feeling" in her head and she mentioned fatigue in a different way; while many previous entries simply mentioned her feeling tired after a long day's work, she now introduced comments on the exhaustion that affected her body, her activities, and her writing :

> am tired of so much work. I sometimes wonder what was designed for woman to do, seems as if there is no end. (August 8, 1884)
>
> I done all I could this afternoon. O dear how tired I do get. my heart beats so fast every little thing I do, and my head, it is bad or at least feels bad. (May 4, 1885)
>
> Am so tired but can feed the turkeys by lying down on the ground to rest. my heart beats fast; my feet swell & I am weak. (May 21 1885)
>
> Mend three cupboard doors where mice had spoiled them; it was a hard job for me to do. am too tired to write, and feel discouraged […] (October 16, 1885)

Underlining words is recurrent in the journal to signal intensity and condense implicit commentaries. In her mid 40s, Emily considered herself old ("[my hands] are like a faded rose; yet tis all right" September 18, 1882) and she attributed her swollen feet and throbbing heart to "dropsy" (most likely caused by high blood pressure). Picturing her husband as a heartless persecutor, she notes that James denied her suffering from this disease: "he does not like to have any one say anything to me about dropsy or being sick, it is his way to let one sicken & die." (May 31, 1885) In the course of 1885, Emily thought that she was actually about to die and the journal's entry for June 1st takes the shape of a will. A few days later, she consulted a phrenologist[9] and got a chart of her head, the result of which she proudly noted down:

> Said it was the most remarkable head he ever examined. that it was almost impossible for a person to reach as high a position as I was capable of doing & also desirous to do. Why it beats all—you scarcely live in this world, but from your high knowledge & great desire for right you live, as it were, heavenly, and and (sic) when in the other world you can only find ideas of the beautiful fulfilled (& much more he said) That I could be one of the finest poets, one of the best authors & in the finest arts I could have reached the very highest. […]
> All is well. My children amply repay me for all I have been obliged to—well—give up. (June 8, 1885)

Phrenology offered, in Emily's eyes, the scientific proof of her intellectual and moral superiority, an argument that could be opposed to her husband's and her sister's vexing sarcasms. The glorious description of her head, which redeemed her weak hands and feet, also materialized her identification to a spiritual—rather than physical—being. It can be argued that, like the diary itself, the head functions as an empowering metaphor of the self. Finally, this entry stages the diarist as a saint ("you scarcely live in this world", "your great desire for right") who sacrificed her genius for the sake of her children. The head, thus, represents a threshold between the material and the immaterial worlds, where the sick diarist believed she was standing.

Ironically, her head, which embodied a higher form of life, also caused her death. A couple of months after the phrenological chart that deciphered the shape of her wonderful skull, she was the victim of a brain "congestion":

> I believe it to be congestion of or on the brain, and but for cold water it seems as if my head would burst […] perhaps a few seconds it did seem as if my head was being crushed through the entire portion of the brain in the vicinity of the Whole top of my head above the ear I had to hold it with both hands with all my might to even have the least impression toward keeping it together […] My head feels literally to have been smashed to pieces, it hurt so badly that it affects my eyes so as to make an appearance of stars among waves, so I can hardly write, and when the worst makes me dizzy too. (August 8, 1885)

The reconstructed narrative of her brain's "explosion" combines detailed space references, with a concern for naming the disease that struck her, as the underlined segment indicates. The images of crushing and bursting testify to Emily's attempt to precisely define the pain she experienced and echo other entries where she notes feeling "crushed" by her husband's, sister's or father's hostility. (293, 298) In this climactic episode, her brain "feels literally to have been smashed to pieces," generating pain but also a new inner universe of "stars among waves" that pathetically evokes visions of infinity. Most significantly, the gesture of holding

her head with both hands in order to "keep it together" seems to have a discursive counterpart through the act of diary writing that also aims at patching the smashed pieces of her self and restoring her unity. The last long comment devoted to the diarist's head bears on the mysterious connections between the brain and literary creation:

> There is one singular thing that appears to act upon my brain, or has done so at times when I am tired […] a sensation not of pain but like a flash, of some unseen object passing through or rather over the very top of head beneath the skull; it must be an electric curant (sic) of an immortal hope; or a helper for invariably when such flashes occur my thoughts are active in the extreme; my pen will go faster and faster until a story founded upon facts is completed in romance. I believe I will write a novel & get it published; will found it upon facts which have come under my observation. (March 1, 1886)

In this passage blending the physical and metaphysical, Emily endeavors to decipher, through her own brain, the mechanism at stake in artistic creation. Electricity materializes the "flash of genius" activating the mental powers detected by the phrenologist and in the process, the weary diarist is sublimated into a famed author. The free movement of the pen, going "faster and faster *until* a story founded upon facts is completed in romance" (italics mine) starkly contrasts with the circular "round of kitchen work" and the physical pain imprisoning Emily. The act of transforming true but unknown facts into published (and hopefully memorable) fiction is ultimately meant to substitute deadly repetition with immortality. This suggests that, beyond its recording and comforting functions, "the story founded upon facts" constructed by the diary was destined to be transfigured into a work of art. Of course, the difficult question, given Emily's habit of carefully crafting her "Diary of life," is to assess to what extent the journal blurred the boundaries between truth and fiction.

Emily never wrote the novel she mentions for she suffered from a severe stroke in May 1886, which left her half-paralyzed. The diary entries covering her last years are filled in a deteriorating handwriting which seems to attest that the final volume is indeed an original version. At this stage, the diary's body and the failing body of the diarist are engaged in a complex mirror effect involving and evacuating physical pain.

"She died a martyr to her two children": the diary as memorial

While the head functions as a powerful metaphor of the diarist's self, Emily Gillespie is careful not to identify too closely with her helpless body. Yet, the last section of the diary can be considered as a form of autopathography, a term Couser uses to designate a great range of texts constructing "an autobiographical narrative of illness." (Couser 65) The types of narratives of illness produced by 19th-century diarists widely vary in scope, style and content. Some, like Louisa May Alcott's record of her final years, can be extremely factual and seemingly devoid of emotion (Sorin); others, like the one by Alice James, are witty, deep and elaborate tales of physical suffering and the disease's progress. Emily Gillespie's account of her illness is neither terse nor sophisticated, and the diseased body, with its daily story of pain and decline, is not staged as a central object of discourse; at the same time, the crippled body certainly stands as the central validation of Emily's autobiographical legacy. In the same way as Emily had chosen to highlight her empowering brain, she opted, during the last stages of her debilitating illness, to stress her selfless soul and clear conscience. In the process, her writing espoused a double movement of acceptance of pain and denunciation of tyranny, of submission and resistance, turning the diary into a testimony of martyrdom.[10]

In her last years, Emily became increasingly vocal about the causes of her disease which she primarily attributed to her husband's insane and sadistic behavior. The diary records more and more scenes of daily humiliation, as James occasionally accused her of pretending to be ill to avoid work or, paradoxically, railed her impotence. Once, in an entry that reads like an allegory of her utter subjection, she relates that James refused to lend her his hand and obliged her to hold on to the wheelbarrow and crawl back to the house.[11] When describing such scenes, Emily typically introduces, through direct speech, the terse and brutal voice of James before concluding on her own dignified endurance: "Ugh! You are the most helpless woman I ever saw for anyone that pretends to know as much as you do, you know everything but cant do anything' I made no reply." (December10, 1885)

Increasingly, however, the tone of some entries becomes openly accusatory. Reflecting on the causes of her failing heath, she bitterly noted:

> I fear my disease is paralysis from over work physically and mental trouble for the past ten years has been more than I could endure, especially the last five years, but I have tried with all my might to overcome the great strain imposed upon me by him who promised to protect and support me through life, but my nerves broke down, my strength failed & now I can scarce walk; however I can not be too thankful I have been permitted to retain my mind. (April 11, 1886)

The term "nerves," an echo of the numerous entries mentioning her feeling "nervous," seems to confirm that Emily accepted the 19th-century medical theory according to which women were biologically dominated by their nervous system. (Rosenberg, Smith-Rosenberg) Her potential fear of becoming insane is also a reflection of this theory which claimed that the nervous system was intimately connected to the womb's functions; thus, the menopause was commonly described as a period when women risked losing their mind. (Smith-Rosenberg, 191) While there is evidence that Emily dreaded the effects of the menopause,[12] the above quote clearly points to her husband as the cause of her physical and mental breakdown. Referring to the broken vows of matrimony ("him who promised to protect me and support me through life"), Emily not only exposes her spouse's treason but also the potential danger of the institution of marriage. In a subsequent entry, worried that her daughter might choose the wrong partner, she compares marriage to "a lottery" and describes suitors as "full of deceit […] with their false tongues" eager to seduce and rule (April 25, 1887). Emily's disillusioned critique of marriage targeted lustful manhood as well as male laws which reduced wives—and especially farmers' wives—to "slaves." The references to women's (and her own) slavery become more numerous as the diary records her failing health. When her aunt died, doubtlessly thinking of her own situation, she exclaimed: "she is another one to die a slave to work and the will of man to rule […] he [her uncle] intended to get her for a wife to work and she did work." (March 8, 1886)

The home ideal and the "family circle" that Emily used to cherish are finally redefined and reduced to a mother-children sphere. It is inside this sphere, ultimately materialized in the new house she and her children moved to, that, as an invalid, she strove to depict a harmonious domestic unit, ruled by love and solidarity. Significantly, the demonization of James is coupled with an idealization of Henry and Sarah which Emily's diary writing operated through a rigorous process of selection. As Temple and Bunkers note in their comparative study of Emily's and Sarah's journals, incidents shedding an unpleasant light on her son's behavior or her daughter's reputation were consciously deleted. (207-208) Instead, Emily underlined her son's kindness and praised her daughter—whom she saw as "myself living again" (February 13, 1886)—for her unfailing support. It seems indeed that Sarah never

failed Emily, both during and after the lifetime of the latter, for she took care of her mother's sick body *and* diary.

After the stroke that left her paralyzed, Emily turned to her daughter as her main nurse and hope for improvement. The mention of professional doctors is globally rare, considering the seriousness of her disease. At one point, the diary mentions magnetic therapy, a popular practice at the time "involving the application of mild electrical charges for correcting physiological imbalances that caused disease." (*A Secret*, 426) Emily, confident in the power of electricity (let us recall her description of its supposed effect on her brain), writes about the regenerating effects of the doctor's treatment, finding that her "hair is not as white"; "it is like bringing the dead back to life," she noted, "In the evening when he draws his hand over me, one can plainly see an electric light follow his fingers upon my flesh; he says he thinks I will get well & be healthier than I ever was before." (April 12, 1887) Yet, the treatment was costly and shortly abandoned, leaving the patient with traditional homemade remedies—potato poultice, catnip tea, warm bath, camphor rubbing, and rest. Emily's enthusiasm for magnetic therapy may have been boosted by the doctor's vision of her disease for Sarah notes in her diary that he "said pa is a poison to her & it is no wonder she is paralyzed." (Bunkers, *All is Well*, 118) The comparison undoubtedly confirmed Emily's, and now her children's conviction, that the main culprit, the true original disease in a sense, was James, the "raving maniac." Logically, then, it is not so much in medicine that Emily believes as in powerful counter poisons to her tyrannical husband, i.e. freedom, financial independence, and healthy physical and mental food. Reacting to James's advice about taking a "patent medicine" and his rebuke that she "did not do something," she confided in her diary: "I would if I could, I would ride out every day & have oysters & fish and other healthy diet & happiness for my brain & let patent medicine go into the turkey feed." (March 9, 1886)

Taken together, the journal's entries covering the last five years of Emily Gillespie's existence, construct a story of disease that is gender and class based, and also hagiographical. In spite—or perhaps because—of the increasing physical pain and powerlessness of the diarist, the journal chooses to leave out the graphic details liable to reduce the author to a "mass of helpless clay." (February 7, 1888) While Sarah's diary provides a minute account of her mother's fainting spells, vomiting, fever and disagreeable smell, Emily's volume emphasizes her daughter's tireless devotion, and, in terms reminiscent of her younger days as a frustrated wife, her own struggling efforts at conforming with the model of the perfect invalid.

> I <u>try</u> to be pleasant and happy all the time, though I am so poor in flesh that the hip-joints are so sore I can scarcely lie on them at night. Yet I have a good appetite […] I really crave oysters […] but I suppose it is not healthy to eat too much and Henry does not like for me to eat it. (January 23, 1887)

With its mention of oysters and the veiled critique addressed to her son, this entry vaguely and disturbingly echoes the previous passage involving James. It is likely that Henry was not always a model of kindness[13] but such glimpses remain rare and carefully worded. Likewise, the references to her sore body parts adopt a rather factual tone and express the intensity of pain mainly through the monosyllable "O" or underlined segments. Very few entries are wholly dedicated to physical suffering, and when pain is mentioned, it is usually inserted among other external events:

> […] I only weighed about 50lbs. nothing but a perfect wreck of humanity. the joints & bones—O! how they hurt when I was moved. Ah, me… Sarah is attending the Normal. (August 4, 1886)

> […] a bed sore came on the joint of my left hip [… Dr Sherman has dressed it 4 times, he cut out a piece of dead flesh larger than a walnut. It is better, has been O so sore. Mr Huftenlen came here the 10th to board & make his home, last Monday he asked Sarah to marry him too old […] (August 30, 1887)
>
> Calamous (sic) day. Clowdy (sic). Sarah cutting a vest for Henry […] I have two terrible sores, hip joints came though the flesh. Oh how glad I was to see Henry. he came home yesterday […] (February 2,1888)

One has to turn to the daughter's diary to get details about the size, the depth, and the terrible smell of these "putrid" hip sores. (*All is Well*, 121-122)
Emily's partial masking of her flesh caught in the process of decay may be linked to a fairly common and healthy movement of dissociation of the self from the disabled body. (Wendell 330) Yet, in her case, the principal reason is to be found in her wish to leave the journal uncontaminated by the literally rotting body of its author. As an expression of her best and immortal self, the diary's textual and material coherence must be preserved. That is why Emily, who had been used to writing on a daily basis for over 2 decades, laments the holes in her diary as much as those in her hips. When illness prevented her from writing, she expressed her sorrow for "leaving" her journal in a manner recalling her mention of physical pain:

> O! dear; I had to cry when I saw how long since I wrote in my Journal. (November 6, 1887)
> I am Sorry to so leave my journal […] (August 30, 1887)
> Once more I try to write, am sorry indeed to have so neglected my journal & could have written many things I would like to have remembered, but each time when I felt like writing no one was near to ask for pen & ink & Book, or were busy. (September 5, 1886).

The will to "remember" and, we could add, to have many things remembered, was actuated through Sarah who, at her mother's request, wrote in the diary and filled in the gaps, literally re-membering the text.[14] These entries, written in a different hand contrasting with the distorted signs laboriously traced by Emily's crippled hand, weave mother's and daughter's bodies and voices into polyphonic and polymorphic texts that blur or rather enlarge the identity of the original narrator and ultimately announce and assert the status of the diary as a filial enterprise. A perfect illustration of this can be found in Emily's will, written by Sarah in the entry for February 7, 1888. Both the will and its mode of insertion testify to the fact that the diary had by now become a literal projection of its author's death, or remaining time. Interestingly, Sarah began writing just following her mother's previous entry (p. 373 of the hard bound volume) but as though she/they? had anticipated that Emily still had a few days to live, she continued p. 378, after the very last entry in Emily's hand. Thus, the broken handwriting of the living mother finds itself encapsulated in her own posthumous voice, inscribed by Sarah. The six-page will is not only about Emily's transmission of her earthly properties; it is also the tale, voiced by the mother and inscribed by the daughter, of Emily's marriage to a suicidal and frantic man who frightened her and forced her to return the deed of the farm (which, she insisted, made it invalid), of her patient suffering, her unceasing efforts at promoting happiness in the family, and of her final decision to forgive James. In fact, these six pages provide a condensed and concerted version of the diary. Curiously, Emily did not

mention her many journal volumes in the long list of items she transmitted to her children. Had she and Sarah agreed orally about what was to be done or could she not resign herself to listing her Diary of Life among hair flowers, armchairs, and other material items? In any case, contrary to the wish of many diarists, she never mentioned destroying them, since they had consciously grown into a testimony of her martyrdom:

> Cannot walk yet. it is indeed a trial to bear. The heart is sometimes broken by trouble & its possor (sic) dies a martyr. I tried so hard to live through it without being known by the outside world, suffered untold sorrow by hearing his abusive language […] God alone knows I have prayed every day that I might know the right way & do right in all my words and doings. I can say with all my heart my conscience is clear. (December 25,1886)

Sarah, when she donated the diary to the Iowa Institute, fulfilled her mother's implicit wish to make it "known by the outside world" and interestingly, she took up the term "martyr" twice in the dedication. In her introductory note to the diaries, she stated: "she died a martyr to her two children, God bless her dear memory; her life full and fleeting with toil and sacrifice"; also, adding a very entry to the journal, dated June 30 1948, and written in a deteriorating handwriting similar to that of Emily, she wrote: "It grieves my heart to review my dear mother's sorrows. She gave her life a martyr to her children." One may wonder why Sarah did not write that Emily had died a martyr to her husband, and why she readily accepted the guilt inherent to her mother's sacrifice. This could be to conform to Emily's desire to be remembered as a selfless, exemplary "Ma,"[15] offering her life to live up to the ideal of true motherhood. Most likely, Sarah preferred to immortalize her mother as a heroine, rather than a slave.

Emily Hawley Gillespie's diary offers a compelling example of the complex facets and multiple functions of diary writing in 19th-century America: far more than a mere record of events, this journal combined the roles of confidant, emotional outlet, proof of the author's literary skills and high intellect, possibly legal evidence of her husband's insanity, testimony of her purity, piety and suffering, and memorial securing a form of immortality. To the very end, Emily considered the diary as an extension of her life, as testify her last words, recorded in Sarah's diary: "She could not cry, for the muscles of her face were paralyzed. She would say […] 'O! I can't tell you' & 'write' & 'paper'." (March 27, 1888) This work of a lifetime, and of mother-daughter collaboration, emerges as a carefully crafted text that blended selection, deletion, obfuscation, and a subtle balance between concealment and revelation. By repeatedly and forcefully exhorting herself to patience and silence, Emily indirectly complained and resisted, as showed her obsessive repetition of "all is well" and underlined statements such as: "I will try to never complain of anything". She also left these puzzling lines: "I have written many things in my journal, but the worst is a secret to be burried (sic) when I shall cease to be." (September 5, 1886) Scholars to this day have not been able to break this "secret" which probably refers to an unspeakable injury inflicted by James. By hinting at the fact that the deepest truth must remain untold—as perhaps some of her original manuscripts must remain invisible—Emily has managed to this day to steep her diary (and herself) in mystery and she has consciously shaped it as a casket impossible to unseal and impossible to bury.

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Notice biographique

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[1] Both terms will be used interchangeably in this essay, as they are by most diary scholars. "Diary" and "journal" both "come from similar Latin roots meaning day or daily, and referring to a day's travel, or daily entry or information." (Gannett, 105-106)

[2] For the purpose of the present essay, the microfilm of the diary manuscript covering 1882-1888 was consulted. By the term "construction," I do not mean that Emily Gillespie lied about her suffering or invented imaginary wrongs. My suggestion is that she attempted to construct a discourse of a model invalid that served many purposes.

[3] Emily gave birth to Henry in 1863 and to twins in 1865 but only Sarah survived. Her comment about the stillborn twin (July 7, 1865) indicates that she did not wish to have many children. Financial reasons and her educational ambition for her offspring may explain her desire to control her fertility. That she was successful in doing so reveals that the couple probably used contraceptive devices besides the menstrual coding that Emily inscribed in her diary. (*A Secret* 185)

[4] Although primarily partaking of a middle class ideology, the cult of domesticity and the criteria of true womanhood (defined as piety, purity, submission and domesticity in Barbara Welter's seminal essay), impacted a wider scope of social strata. Among the most influential vectors of the domestic ideal were *Godey's Lady's Book*, Catharine Beecher's "*A Treatise on Domestic Economy for the Use of Young Ladies at Home and at School*," first published in 1841, and later revised and expanded into the immensely popular *The American Woman's Home* (1869), co-signed with Harriet Beecher Stowe. While there is no evidence that Emily possessed these books, Lensink notes that she subscribed to *Peterson's Magazine*, which also promoted the values of domesticity. (189)

[5] Obfuscation, the act of deliberately making something confused, partakes of the wider phenomenon of encoding that Suzanne Bunkers perceives in 19th-century women's diaries. She defines encoding as an oblique mode of writing, including "indirection, contradiction, deviation and silences." Bunkers notes that "A woman might speak indirectly by deleting the pronoun "I" or by using qualifiers such as *possibly* or *I think that* […] She might employ silences in choosing not to write about such taboo subjects as sexuality, labor and childbirth, and menstruation." ("Midwestern Diaries and Journals", 192) Emily Gillespie uses many forms of encoding in her diary, through the poems, the blurring of the pronoun "I," the recurrence of "seem" qualifying her statements, the marginal notes, and her avowed (or uncommented) choice of silence. Her pregnancy and childbirth are not detailed, like in many 19th-century women's diaries.

[6] *Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly* was the radical women's rights newspaper supporting suffrage, free love and spiritualism, edited by Tennessee Claflin and her scandalous sister Victoria Woddhull, who ran in the 1872 presidential election. Emily Gillespie's approval of the newspaper was not incompatible with her religion, universalism, which stressed reason, universal salvation, education and human potential; as such, the Universalist philosophy was congenial to women's claim to equality. (*A Secret* 186-187) Besides, the paper's radical denunciation of the sexual double standard and its global vision of woman as the "slave" of man's laws were probably welcomed by Emily Gillespie.

[7] Emily regularly describes herself as slandered and abused by her kin. She especially had conflicting relations with her sister Harriet whom she found uneducated, unfeminine and unjust; the diary reports that she accused Emily of making James work like a slave (March 15, 1885) and that she repeatedly sided with him. There were also conflicts over the bureau which Emily's mother bequeathed to her but which ended up in the hands of her father.

[8] Suzanne Bunkers uses this phrase to describe the Gillespie household, providing the following definition: "one whose members do not think or behave in healthy ways. According to Janet Woititz and Melody Beattie, families that suffer from forms of physical and/or emotional abuse are dysfunctional. Paradoxically the dysfunction seen and felt by family members is often well hidden from individuals outside the family unit. This 'invisibility' is one of the hallmarks of the dysfunctional family" ("Diaries and Dysfunctional Families" 232). Emily and Sarah indeed often confide in their diaries that James has a double personality, pretending to be kind and concerned in public, and behaving like a maniac private.

[9] Phrenology, now considered a pseudoscience, was an immensely popular discipline in the 19th-century which claimed that the study of the skull's bumps and shape can reveal the person's "faculties." In the late 19th century, phrenology was starting to lose some of its prestige but Emily, like many other people, was still attracted to the inward possibilities it pointed to. She also had a chart made of her children's heads which revealed promising futures for them.

[10] Etymologically the term "martyr" is related to "witness"; in the present context, the act of diary writing makes Emily not only the object but the witness to her husband's cruel treatment, as it eventually turns the diary into the witness to her suffering.

[11] It must be noted that Sarah's diary also recorded her father's "fits," his cruelty to animals and humiliating treatment of her mother. Bunkers suggests that the recording of James's misdeeds, in mother's and daughter's diaries, may have been part of a plan to compile evidence in case of divorce on the grounds of inhuman treatment and endangerment of life. ("Diaries and Dysfunctional Families" 224)

[12] "I do wish I may not be so nervous […] my hope & prayer, that I may never lose my reason as many have done at my age of life." (May 6, 1884)

[13] Sarah's diary relates that Henry, on inviting a guest to sleep at their house, told his mother he was ashamed of her appearance in the morning and would rather she did not sleep in the hallway. This led her to sleep on the floor of Sarah's bedroom. The incident is not mentioned in Emily's diary which only notes that she slept on the floor. (Temple and Bunkers, 207-208)

[14] After her stroke in early May 1886, the diary is kept sporadically until August 27 and her daughter wrote an entry on May 26. In late 1887, entries in Sarah's hand became more frequent: November 16, December 28, and February 7 1888.

[15] Emily routinely refers to herself as "Ma" in the diary.